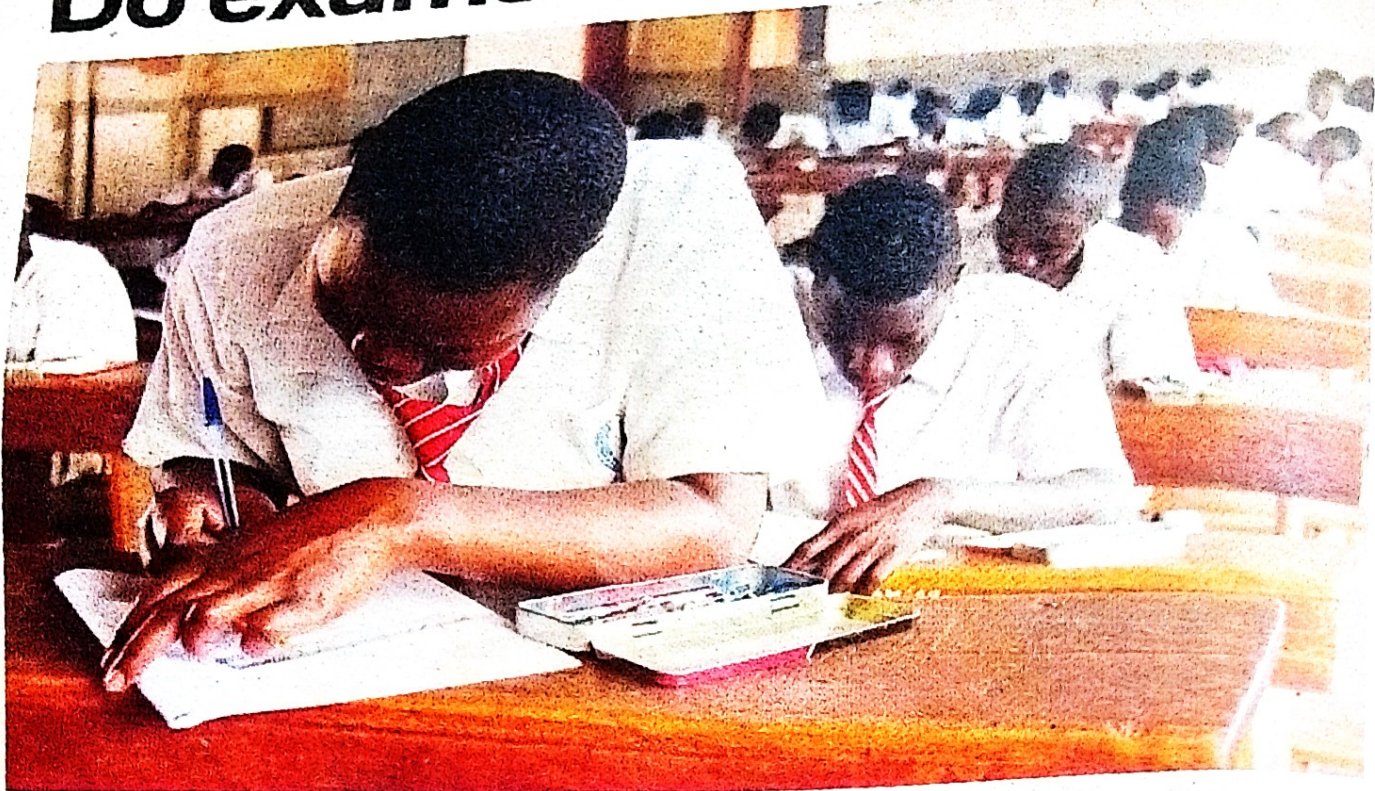




# Do exams measure intellect



Students at Uganda Certificate of Education Examinations last year. FILE PHOTO

### KEY

Alinda Violet - advocacy manager, public policy engagement

Assessment is for three purposes: learning - this is terminal, so we have exams such as PLE, UCE, UACE to examine progress from one level to another.

Purpose for learning. This kind of assessment is diagnostic or informative. It is to inform the learning process, guide learners, and reflect on delivery mechanisms, among others.

Then there is assessment with purpose of learning. Here, the learner is at the centre and is part of the assessment. Available gaps in the learning process are identified and solutions for self-help found.

In my opinion though, the question we should be asking is whether standardised national exams are positioned in the wider context of assessing abilities such as creativity, employability among others, to a country with underemployment, unemployment, limited employable skills - we should be interrogating the extent to which these assessments are responsive to addressing these issues in a meaningful way.

Last Friday, Uganda National Examinations Board released 2017 Primary Leaving Examination results of thousands of candidates. But as the excitement of those who passed highly dies out and the tears of those who failed dry up, what is the meaning of true intelligence? Can standardised tests be used to measure one's true intelligence?

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One among many students' concerns is the examinations. You either pass or fail. The recently released Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) results have certainly left pupils in different categories. The perceived 'intelligent' pupils passed the exams and the less intelligent failed - if we are to go by the standards of many.

Joan, a student at Standard High School, Zana is has had problems with passing examinations since primary school.

While in primary, she was always promoted on trial, or made to repeat classes. That - to her teachers, parents and peers, put her in the category of 'non-intelligent' learners.

But Benjamin Rukwengye, founder Teach for Uganda, says national examinations are simply a measure of memorisation - which is the lowest skill if one is to look at higher order thinking.

"Students are passed/failed based on how they can remember and reproduce content; not if they understand, comprehend and apply it - which is the purpose of education and learning," Rukwengye asserts, adding that in the end, schools, parents and students celebrate results without asking if children learnt anything at all.

On the contrary, Evelyn Nabakka, a par-

ent, says exams, to some extent are a measure of one's intelligence. "A bright student passes exams and one who is not does not. Exams may not be the yardstick for measuring intellect, but they are able to echo a student's intellect," Nabakka says.

But Joan believes an exam should not be enough to prove one's intellect. "Some students practice exam malpractice, others just cram to pass - that does not make them more intelligent," she says. She also notes that so-called weak students may have their own areas of strength that are not necessarily academic.

### Success in life

Daniel Zuchowski, an international author and educationist, notes: "First of all, school exams definitely do not measure intelligence. Intelligence is not a reflection of knowledge. However, the more intelligent you are, the easier it is to acquire knowledge, and the easier it is for one to be successful in different aspects of life," he says.

He also points out how the most intelligent people in the world are people who do not have formal education.

"The key, however, is to make those exams reflect the true and practical knowledge possessed by a student. Making a student memorise lists of facts, without the knowledge of how those facts can be

applied in real life, is an intolerable waste of time and resources," Zuchowski adds.

Grace Rebecca Senkumba, a teacher at St Mary's Secondary School Namagoma, says, "National examinations do very little in measuring a student's intellect. Policy wise, however, we cannot talk about changing or even removing national assessment exams without talking about changing/improving the learning process - which should involve both the student and the teacher contributing. The aim of the assessment (which also has its own issues) only reflects how sick the learning process is."

### Fair assessment

Onesmus Oyosigye, the executive secretary - Uganda Business and Technical Examination Board, says the relevance of standardised examinations (national assessment) is to create a fair, equal assessment of a student's academic progress that may not be given at an individual school/institutional level.

"At universities, some graduates are awarded first class degrees because of the tradition of just passing students. That is partly why some of the graduates cannot express themselves. You find a student who has passed, but not studied. Such gaps justify the need for national assessment because it provides a fair and equal way of assessment."

And like Ronald Mayanja, the chief executive office of Ability Explored, a skills advocacy organisation says when you look at successful people in society today, they are not exactly those who were bright in the classroom but people who were vibrant in society and have weaved their way through to success.